

Faith Practices as Predictors of Emotional Resilience: Evidence from Kenyan Adolescents.

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ABSTRACT

This study examines the relationship between personal faith practices and subjective wellbeing among secondary school students in Kasarani Constituency, Nairobi, guided by Self-Determination Theory (Legault, 2017), Erikson's Psychosocial Stages Theory (1950), Organismic Integration Theory (Gerstenberg et al., 2023), and Frankl's Meaning-Making Theory (2006). An explanatory sequential mixed-methods design was employed, combining quantitative surveys with 297 students and qualitative interviews with 17 participants. Quantitative analysis revealed significant positive correlations between faith practices and both life satisfaction and positive affect. Prayer emerged as the most common practice, followed by scripture reading. Qualitative narratives highlighted themes of emotional relief, intimacy with God, spiritual guidance, and inner peace, underscoring the role of faith practices in resilience and emotional regulation. Conversely, disengagement from prayer was linked to spiritual fatigue, unmet expectations, and social alienation. The study concludes that personal faith practices contribute meaningfully to adolescent wellbeing by enhancing resilience and life satisfaction.

The study recommends integrating individualized spiritual support into school-based mental health strategies, enriching discourse on spiritual coping and highlighting the value of internalized religiosity in promoting holistic wellbeing.

Keywords: faith practices, prayer, scripture reading, emotional regulation, adolescents, mixed methods, wellbeing

INTRODUCTION

In today's rapidly evolving social landscape, individuals increasingly seek happiness, emotional balance, and goal fulfilment—collectively referred to as subjective wellbeing (SWB). SWB encompasses both affective and cognitive dimensions, including pleasant emotions, low psychological distress, and high life satisfaction (Nayyar, 2019; Perez & Rohde, 2022). For adolescents, SWB is a critical marker of psychological health and developmental success, particularly during identity formation and emotional challenges.

Within this context, faith-based practices provide important coping resources, offering pathways to resilience and balance. For instance, practices such as prayer, scripture reading, fasting, and meditation have been linked to healthier behaviours and improved wellbeing (Kruk & Aboul Enein, 2024). Unlike external religiosity (e.g., attending services), personal faith practices give adolescents private spaces for reflection and emotional regulation, while also providing spiritual grounding (Pargament, 2007; Miller, 2015).

Although global scholarship has extensively documented the role of personal faith practices in adolescent wellbeing, empirical studies within African contexts—and Kenya in particular—remain comparatively scarce. Most local research emphasizes external religiosity over individualized spiritual routines, leaving a gap in understanding how personal practices shape adolescent wellbeing.

This gap is particularly significant given Kenya's high levels of youth religiosity and the cultural importance of faith as a coping resource. Moreover, conventional interventions such as cognitive behavioural therapy remain dominant, while faith-based practices are underutilized in mainstream mental health strategies (Nanji & Olivier, 2024).

This study therefore seeks to fill these gaps by examining the relationship between personal faith practices and SWB among secondary school students in Kasarani Constituency, Nairobi. Specifically, it investigates how prayer and scripture reading contribute to adolescents' life satisfaction, positive affect, and emotional regulation. By employing an explanatory sequential mixed methods design, the study aims to generate both statistical evidence and contextual insights, thereby advancing understanding of how individualized spiritual routines can serve as protective factors in adolescent mental health.

Research Design

This study employed a correlational design within an explanatory sequential mixed methods framework. Quantitative analysis examined the relationship between personal faith practices and SWB using standardized wellbeing scales and self-reported measures of prayer and scripture reading. This was followed by qualitative inquiry through semi-structured interviews to contextualize adolescents' lived experiences. Integrating these approaches enhanced methodological rigor and provided a comprehensive understanding of adolescent wellbeing (Eryilmaz, 2015).

Given the involvement of adolescents, ethical approval was obtained from the relevant institutional review board, and informed consent was secured from both participants and their guardians. Confidentiality and anonymity were maintained throughout the study to ensure adherence to ethical research standards.

Study Area and Population

The study was conducted in Kasarani Constituency, Nairobi County, which has the highest concentration of secondary schools (66) among the county's 17 constituencies. Kasarani was selected for its large student population and diverse religious landscape. Two wards—Clay City and Mwiki—were randomly chosen, comprising 12 schools in total. From these, five schools were purposively selected to ensure diversity and accessibility. The target population included Form One to Form Four students, aged approximately 14–18 years, totaling 1,125 learners. Participation was limited to students who provided assent and whose guardians granted informed consent.

Sampling Procedure and Sample Size

A multi-stage sampling strategy was employed. Kasarani Constituency was selected through convenience sampling due to its high concentration of secondary schools and diverse religious landscape. Two wards and five secondary schools were identified through simple random sampling. Using Yamane's (1967) formula, a sample of 297 students was drawn for the quantitative phase. From this group, 17 students were purposively selected for qualitative interviews through extreme case sampling, based on exceptionally high or low scores in faith engagement and wellbeing, thereby capturing contrasting adolescent experiences. In line with ethical requirements, only students who provided assent and whose guardians granted informed consent were included in the study.

Data Collection Methods and Instruments

Quantitative data were collected using standardized questionnaires with closed-ended items, while qualitative data were obtained through semi-structured interviews comprising 14 open-ended questions. All instruments were pretested at St. Francis of Assisi Secondary School to ensure clarity, reliability, and contextual relevance. The pilot study yielded satisfactory reliability coefficients, with Cronbach's alpha values above 0.70 for; faith practice and wellbeing scales, confirming internal consistency. Content validity was established through expert review conducted by my two supervisors: one a counseling psychologist and the other a specialist in religious

studies. They assessed item relevance and appropriateness for Kenyan adolescents, ensuring that the instruments were both contextually sensitive and theoretically grounded. Questionnaires were administered in classroom settings, while interviews were conducted one-on-one and audio-recorded with consent.

Faith practices and religious salience were measured using a 4-point Likert scale adapted from Pearce et al. (2017), designed to capture both external behaviours and internal convictions. The response options included *Strongly disagree*, *Disagree*, *Agree*, and *Strongly agree*. Items were culturally adapted to reflect Kenyan adolescent contexts, for example by incorporating locally familiar expressions of religious practice such as school fellowship attendance and family prayer routines.

Subjective wellbeing was assessed using an adapted version of the Subjective Wellbeing Scale (Diener, 1984; Cherry, 2022). The original scale contains 62 items across three domains: frequent positive affect, infrequent negative affect, and life satisfaction. For this study, 22 items were selected and rated on a 4-point Likert scale (0 = Not at all to 3 = All the time), providing a comprehensive measure of adolescents' emotional regulation, resilience, and overall wellbeing. Qualitative interviews explored adolescents' lived experiences of personal faith practices and their perceived impact on wellbeing, offering narrative depth to complement the statistical findings.

Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using SPSS Version 26. Descriptive statistics summarized religious beliefs and practices, while Pearson correlation coefficients assessed associations between faith practices and subjective wellbeing (SWB). Assumptions of normality and linearity were checked to ensure the appropriateness of correlation analysis and statistical significance was determined at the $p < 0.05$ level.

Qualitative data were analyzed through content analysis to identify recurring themes and interpretive categories in participants' narratives, illuminating how faith practices relate to emotional resilience and life satisfaction. Interviews were transcribed verbatim, coded systematically, and grouped into thematic clusters to capture adolescents' lived experiences. Ethical approval was obtained from relevant institutional bodies, and informed consent was secured from all participants prior to data collection.

STUDY FINDINGS

Personal Prayer as a Pillar of Emotional Resilience and Spiritual Fulfilment

Personal prayer emerged as the most practiced faith activity, with a mean score of 3.98 (SD = 1.06) and 77.1% of respondents affirming they often pray alone. This high engagement underscores prayer's centrality in adolescents' spiritual lives. Respondents consistently described prayer as fostering confidence, clarity, intimacy with God, and relief from stress, anger, and depression. Themes of forgiveness, gratitude, and moral grounding also emerged, highlighting prayer's role in emotional regulation and spiritual connectedness. For example, Respondent 041 explained: *"When I pray with a sincere heart, I find navigating through life confidently and being able to cope with my challenges."* Respondent 009 emphasized prayer's emotional comfort: *"When challenges were resolved through prayer, the sense of relief I experienced was profoundly gratifying."*

These reflections illustrate prayer's role in stress management and emotional regulation, consistent with Kaivu's (2018) findings that inner religious belief fosters resilience and self-assurance. McMinn (2011) similarly argues that prayer enhances psychological wellbeing, purpose, and life satisfaction, a point echoed in Respondent 012's portrayal of prayer as a moment of intimacy with God.

Bernstein (2020) adds a neuropsychological perspective, emphasizing that spiritual meditation—including prayer—calms the nervous system and reduces anxiety; a particularly relevant insight given adolescents' heightened emotional volatility during peer dynamics and identity formation.

Respondents 017 and 018 described prayer as producing soothing effects and inner healing, supporting Bernstein's claim that spiritual words provide psychological anchoring beyond what secular meditation may replicate. Wachholtz and Pargament (2005) reinforce this conclusion, noting that spiritual meditation yields greater psychological rewards due to its deeper emotional resonance.

Quantitative results reinforced these narratives: personal prayer showed significant positive correlations with life satisfaction ($r = .239$, $p < .001$) and positive affect ($r = .211$), aligning with Villani et al. (2019), Smith et al. (2020), and Yaden et al. (2022). The qualitative narratives further illustrate this, with respondents describing prayer as a source of joy, gratitude, and emotional grounding—core components of SWB. Respondent 009's account of forgiveness through prayer facilitated the management of anger and depression, underscoring the therapeutic dimension of spiritual engagement. This experiential depth resonates with Eros and Plante (2023), who demonstrate that centering prayer enhances meaning in life, echoing respondents' reflections on existential fulfilment.

Together, both statistical evidence and qualitative accounts affirm that personal prayer is not merely ritualistic but a therapeutic engagement with the divine. It fosters emotional resilience, psychological wellbeing, and spiritual fulfilment, positioning prayer as a central pillar of adolescent SWB in Kasarani.

Scripture Reading as a Source of Emotional and Spiritual Wellbeing

Scripture reading emerged as the second most practiced personal faith activity among secondary school students in Kasarani ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.27$), with 54.5% reporting regular engagement. This level of participation reflects the perceived emotional and spiritual value of sacred texts such as the Bible and the Quran. Respondents consistently described scripture as a source of joy, peace, and emotional grounding—core components of SWB. For instance, Respondent 019 described the Bible as “*God’s manual*,” emphasizing its role in clarity and direction. Respondent 010 affirmed: “*I trust in the promises God made in the Bible... This belief strengthens me and brings me peace.*” Similarly, Respondent 003 reflected: “*The Bible, to me, is more than a religious text—it is a source of encouragement and direction. The Psalms offer comfort when I’m struggling, and Proverbs provide practical wisdom that helps me make everyday decisions.*” Respondent 023 highlighted that biblical stories of resilience instilled hope in personal struggles, while Respondent 041 described scripture as a source of meaning and purpose. These findings align with broader scholarship showing that regular scripture engagement reduces stress and loneliness among adolescents (Clearfork Academy, 2025), while also fostering identity formation and resilience (Shine, 2025).

In summary, these reflections reveal that scripture functions not merely as doctrinal instruction but as a contemplative emotional cornerstone—providing reflective insight, spiritual encouragement, and a sense of divine presence that sustains individuals through hardship. In this way, scripture reading contributes to adolescents' emotional resilience and spiritual fulfilment, reinforcing its role as a vital practice within their broader faith experience.

Cross-Faith Resonance of Sacred Texts

Muslim respondents’ reflections

Muslim participants expressed deep reverence for the Quran, describing it as a source of clarity and divine connection. Respondents 017, 036, and 037 viewed the Quran as a direct link to Allah, offering happiness, satisfaction, and solutions to life's challenges.

Respondent 017 explained: “*When I read the Quran, I feel like Allah is speaking directly to me. It gives me answers when I feel lost.*” This highlights the perception of scripture as a personal dialogue with the divine, offering guidance during moments of uncertainty. Respondent 036 noted: “*The Quran helps me stay calm. When I’m stressed, I read and I feel better.*” Here, the emphasis shifts to the Quran's role in emotional regulation, functioning as a coping mechanism for stress and anxiety. Respondent 037 added: “*It is like the Quran knows what I’m going through. I find peace in its verses.*” This reflection underscores the divine empathy and reassurance, illustrating how scripture offers comfort tailored to individual struggles.

These findings resonate with broader scholarship showing that Quran reading and prayer serve as powerful coping mechanisms among Muslims, fostering emotional regulation and resilience (Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015). Koenig (2012) similarly emphasizes that religious practices, including scripture engagement, contribute to psychological wellbeing and stress reduction. Together, both respondent narratives and scholarly evidence affirm that sacred texts function as emotional anchors, providing adolescents with clarity, resilience, and a sense of divine presence.

Christian respondents' parallels

The Muslim respondents' reflections parallel those of Christian respondents, reinforcing scripture's significance as an emotional foundation. Respondent 012 described how engaging with sacred texts brought relief and divine comfort, noting that God's mercy eased burdens and fostered inner peace. This highlights scripture's role in providing emotional release and reassurance during times of struggle. Respondent 041 similarly emphasized scripture as a source of meaning and purpose.

This perspective illustrates how sacred texts not only comfort but also guide adolescents toward a sense of direction and foundational clarity. Together, these accounts highlight the universal role of sacred texts in shaping emotional and spiritual wellbeing across faith traditions, showing their shared function as pillars of resilience and hope.

Scholarly evidence echoes these insights. Weber and Pargament (2014) found that integrating Quran reading into therapy improved outcomes for Muslim clients. Elhadidy (2023) affirmed scripture's capacity to provide emotional support and solutions to life's challenges. McGarvey (2024) illustrates scripture's role in offering spiritual assurance through *Mark 11:24* (NIV), which conveys a powerful message about the connection between prayer and faith. Wetherell (2016) and Lien (2022) further highlight scripture's contribution to practical guidance, peace during trials, and emotional healing.

Collectively, these findings affirm that scripture fosters resilience, reduces negative emotions, and strengthens wellbeing. Respondents consistently described scripture reading as a source of hope, wisdom, joy, peace of mind, and satisfaction. This theme of bearing hardship with spiritual strength was affirmed by respondents 011, 012, 014, 018, 019, 022, 024, and 041, who linked scripture engagement to emotional stability and positive thinking.

Emotional Strength and Clarity Through Scripture Reading

The emotional strength and clarity derived from scripture reading were closely linked to themes of divine assurance and fulfilment of promises. Respondents 010 and 014 emphasized that faith in God's promises, cultivated through scripture, strengthened their trust and brought peace. Respondent 012 observed: *"Through God's mercy and care, as expressed in His word, I feel my burdens and stress are eased. It's like a sense of peace and joy fills my heart."*

Together, these findings affirm that scripture reading emerges as a common spiritual practice that serves as a catalyst for growth, fostering emotional strength, nurturing spiritual intimacy, and promoting holistic wellbeing. Scholars such as Pargament (1997), Villani et al. (2019), and Wetherell (2016) emphasize scripture's role as a coping resource that reduces stress, fosters resilience, and provides peace during trials. Their insights reinforce the therapeutic dimension described by respondents, highlighting scripture's contribution to emotional stability and life satisfaction.

Positive Affect and Life Satisfaction as Outcomes of Faith Engagement

Quantitative analysis revealed a statistically significant positive correlation between personal faith practices and both positive affect ($r = .211, p < .001$) and life satisfaction ($r = .239, p < .001$), indicating that the likelihood of these findings occurring by chance is extremely low. This suggests that respondents who engage more consistently in personal spiritual activities tend to experience higher levels of emotional wellbeing and fulfilment.

Qualitative accounts strongly supported these results, illustrating how faith practices—particularly prayer and scripture reading—contribute to inner stability, emotional grounding, and a sense of purpose. Respondent 012 described scripture engagement as a source of contentment and reassurance, easing burdens and fostering calm assurance. Similarly, Respondent 010 affirmed: *"I trust in the promises God made in the Bible. This belief strengthens me and brings me peace."* These reflections illustrate how spiritual conviction and personal devotion foster emotional upliftment and inner harmony.

Beyond scripture, prayer also emerged as a key coping mechanism. Respondent 019 explained that prayer helped navigate peer pressure and emotional stress: *"When I'm overwhelmed by peer pressure, I turn to prayer—it helps"*

me feel centered and gives me the courage to stay true to myself.” This sense of clarity was highlighted by Respondent 041, who explained that sincere prayer enabled confident decision making and coping with life’s challenges.

The benefits of faith were not limited to moments of crisis. Respondents also described hope, gratitude, and satisfaction as regular outcomes of spiritual engagement. Respondent 003 reflected that scripture reading offered wisdom and encouragement during difficult times, guiding daily decisions and infusing life with meaning.

In summary, these findings affirm that personal faith practices—particularly prayer and scripture reading—foster positive emotions, emotional resilience, and life satisfaction. Echoing prior scholarship (Villani et al., 2019; Smith et al., 2020), regular engagement in personal faith practices enhances wellbeing and reinforces the lived experiences of respondents. This alignment sets the stage for examining their weaker associations with negative affect.

Weak Association Between Faith Practice and Negative Affect

While personal faith practices demonstrated significant positive correlations with life satisfaction and positive affect, the relationship with negative affect was notably weaker and statistically insignificant ($r = .089$, $p = .126$). This suggests that, within the sampled population in Kasarani, personal faith engagement does not reliably predict lower levels of negative emotions such as sadness, anxiety, or anger.

This slight negative trend invites reflection, particularly when viewed alongside qualitative narratives and broader theoretical frameworks. Although no direct respondent quotes explicitly addressed reductions in negative affect, several participants described emotional relief and peace of mind resulting from prayer and scripture reading—indirectly pointing to a possible buffering effect.

Respondent 012 observed that engaging with scripture eased emotional burdens and fostered calm assurance, while Respondent 019 noted that prayer helped manage peer pressure and emotional stress. These reflections suggest that while faith practices may not eliminate negative emotions, they provide coping mechanisms that help students navigate emotional challenges more effectively.

Supporting this perspective, Pargament (2002) emphasizes that religious coping strategies such as prayer and meditation foster psychological resilience and reduce distress during adversity. In a different context, Jang et al. (2021) found that private religiosity among South African inmates was associated with lower levels of anger, depression, and anxiety, highlighting the potential of spiritual practices to regulate negative emotional states. Echoing prior scholarship (Pargament, 2002; Lien, 2022), faith engagement has been shown to help individuals bear hardship with emotional strength, suggesting that spiritual practices may serve as an anchoring presence even when they do not directly suppress negative affect.

Overall, these studies suggest that personal faith practices may not always produce immediate emotional relief but can contribute to long-term emotional regulation and resilience. In the context of this study, the lack of a statistically significant correlation between faith practice and negative affect may reflect the complexity of adolescent emotional experiences, where spiritual engagement coexists with other psychosocial stressors. Nonetheless, the qualitative data and supporting literature affirm that personal faith practices, while not directly suppressing negative affect, provide meaningful psychological support and foster long-term emotional stability.

Faith Practices as Culturally Embedded and Consistently Valued

The overall mean score for personal faith practice among the respondents was 3.27 (SD = 0.81), indicating moderate to high engagement across the sample. The relatively low standard deviation suggests a shared valuation of personal spiritual activities such as prayer, scripture reading, fasting, and devotion. This consistency points to the cultural embeddedness of faith practices within the student population, where spiritual engagement is not only common but also deeply integrated into daily life.

The descriptive statistics further reinforce this pattern: personal prayer had the highest mean score (3.98), followed by scripture/Quran reading (3.41), while fasting (2.62) and Sabbath observance (2.91) were less

frequently practiced. These findings suggest that while certain practices are more dominant, personal faith as a whole remains a significant aspect of respondents' lived experiences.

Qualitative reflections further affirmed this shared spiritual orientation. Respondents described spiritual practices as essential to their identity and emotional wellbeing. For example, Respondent 012 underscored the deeply personal experience of engaging with scripture, expressing that a sense of closeness to God evokes the feeling of being heard by Him, which in turn fosters greater fulfilment and happiness.

Respondent 003 described the Bible as a source of hope and guidance, noting: *"When I face challenges, I turn to its teachings, and they help me find joy and strength."* These reflections illustrate how faith practices are not merely inherited rituals, but personally meaningful engagements that shape students' emotional and spiritual landscapes.

Scholarly evidence reinforces these accounts. Momanyi (2023) found that personal faith practices among Kenyan adolescents were closely tied to emotional wellbeing, with a significant correlation ($r = 0.328$, $p < 0.001$) between religious engagement and life satisfaction. Ganaprakasam and Hutagalung (2018) emphasized that religious commitment among youth fosters moral development, self-efficacy, and social cohesion—attributes that contribute to both individual wellbeing and community belonging. These findings align with the current study's results, suggesting that personal faith practices are not isolated behaviours but part of a broader cultural and psychosocial framework.

Moreover, the consistency in engagement reflects a collective stability, where faith integrated into daily routines—especially prayer and scripture reading—upholds wellbeing across individual differences. This shared commitment serves as a stabilizing force, offering continuity, purpose, and emotional grounding amidst adolescent challenges.

Divine Assurance and Fulfilment of Promises Through Sacred Texts

An emerging insight from the qualitative phase of the study was the role of sacred texts—both the Bible and the Quran—as sources of divine assurance, emotional grounding, and fulfilment of promises. This theme was strongly reflected in the quantitative data, where scripture reading ranked as the second most practiced faith activity ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.27$), with 54.5% of respondents reporting regular engagement.

The qualitative narratives revealed that respondents did not merely read scripture as a religious obligation, but as a deeply personal act that fostered spiritual intimacy, emotional relief, and a sense of divine responsiveness. Several respondents linked scripture reading to peace of mind and emotional upliftment.

Respondents 003 and 021 reported experiencing mental peace through scripture, while Respondent 041 shared: *"Reading the Bible allows me to surrender my inner self to God. It is in these quiet, personal moments that I feel a deep sense of peace and joy."*

Respondents 011, 012, 019, and 022 described the Bible as a source of meaning and purpose, with Respondent 003 elaborating: *"The Psalms uplift me during difficult moments, and Proverbs offer practical guidance. Together, they bring hope and purpose to my life."* These reflections highlight scripture's role in offering inner stability, spiritual guidance, and a deep sense of hope.

Together, the combined findings reveal that scripture reading—whether from the Bible or the Quran, stands out as a profound spiritual exercise that meaningfully reinforces emotional resilience, enriches spiritual bonds, and elevates SWB. The narratives of divine assurance, emotional grounding, and fulfilment of promises help explain why this practice is central to students' spiritual lives.

Supported by a wide body of literature (Pargament, 1997; Koenig, 2012; Abu-Raiya & Pargament, 2015), these insights affirm the explanatory power of the qualitative phase and reinforce the coherence of the sequential mixed method design. Yet, a contrasting perspective also emerged. Not all students experienced scripture engagement positively. While many respondents found spiritual strength in sacred texts, others described disengagement and distance from spiritual practices. This diversity of adolescent spiritual experiences reflects broader scholarship

on religious disengagement. For example, Smith and Denton (2005) established that American teenagers struggle with inconsistent or declining religious involvement, highlighting the complexity of faith engagement. The following discussion examines this disengagement in greater detail, highlighting the diversity of adolescent spiritual experiences.

Disengagement from Prayer—Spiritual Fatigue, Alienation, and Evolving Beliefs

While the majority (77.1%) of respondents in Kasarani reported frequent engagement in personal prayer ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.06$), a notable minority (14.5%) indicated that they do not pray at all. This divergence prompted deeper qualitative exploration into reasons for disengagement.

A dominant theme was spiritual fatigue and unmet expectations, where prayer was perceived as ritual without resonance. Respondent 029 reflected: *“I used to pray every night, but it started to feel like I was just repeating words. Nothing changed, so I stopped praying.”* Similarly, Respondent 008 shared: *“Prayer feels like a routine, something you do because you are told to, not because it helps.”* Others linked disengagement to unanswered prayers. Respondent 015 recounted: *“I prayed for my parents to stop fighting, but it never worked. I felt like God was not listening.”* Respondent 004 shared: *“I kept asking for peace in my heart, but I just felt more confused. Eventually, I gave up.”*

These accounts show how disappointment and silence can erode spiritual motivation, even though prayer is often associated with resilience and life satisfaction (Smith et al., 2020; Yaden et al., 2022). This contrast highlights the delicate balance between faith and psychological wellbeing—where practices may sustain resilience for some but provoke alienation for others.

Another theme that emerged was the evolution of personal beliefs beyond traditional religious frameworks. Respondent 005 stated: *“Prayer does not fit into how I see the world anymore,”* while Respondent 026 added: *“I don’t reject spirituality, but I don’t think prayer is the only way to connect with God. It feels outdated.”* These reflections reveal a generational shift toward individualized spirituality, where traditional forms of devotion are questioned or redefined.

This contrasts with You and Lim (2019), who found that sincere religious orientation and scripture study foster consistency and purpose—dimensions central to SWB. The divergence in Kasarani illustrates how evolving beliefs may challenge traditional frameworks while still seeking ultimate meaning. In this way, adolescents’ disengagement from prayer does not necessarily signal a rejection of spirituality but rather a reconfiguration of how meaning and connection are pursued.

Social dynamics within religious communities also contributed to disengagement. Respondent 027 recalled: *“I wore ripped jeans — the tattered style common among teenagers — to a youth prayer meeting and got scolded. I felt judged, not welcomed.”* Respondent 013 added: *“They expect you to behave in a certain way before you can even pray. It is like you have to earn the right to talk to God.”* These experiences fostered a sense of alienation, where prayer was perceived not as a safe space but as a gatekeeping mechanism tied to behavioural expectations. Such experiences contrast with Okoli et al. (2022), who demonstrated that religious wellbeing enhances emotional resilience and interpersonal sensitivity. Their findings suggest that supportive communities foster wellbeing, whereas judgmental environments risk alienation.

These narratives are supported by existing literature. Szcześniak et al. (2022) found that young adults lacking meaning are more prone to distress and identity confusion, while Ntsanwisi (2024) observed that African youth often perceive traditional prayer practices as rigid and detached from lived realities. Ndegwa (2002) similarly observed growing disillusionment with institutional religion among Kenyan youth, where teachings fail to resonate with personal experience.

Together, these studies highlight how prayer can symbolize ambiguity rather than comfort, especially in the absence of relatable mentors and safe spaces for authentic expression.

The above findings underscore the relevance of meaning-centered and humanistic psychological frameworks. Frankl (2006) emphasized the human drive for meaning as central to wellbeing, while Erikson (1950) situated

adolescence as a critical stage for identity formation. Respondent reflections illustrate this tension: for some, scripture and prayer offered strength and guidance, while for others disengagement reflected role confusion and unmet expectations.

Self-Determination Theory explains how autonomy and relatedness shape wellbeing, with Organismic Integration Theory (Gerstenberg et al., 2023) showing how imposed routines can be internalized or rejected. Respondent narratives reflected this continuum, from deeply integrated practices to disengagement, illustrating faith as a personal journey shaped by evolving identity. Wetherell (2016) reinforced this view, noting that sacred texts provide nourishment, hope, and healing, echoing Frankl's and Erikson's emphasis on meaning and identity.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

Holistically, personal faith practices among Kasarani secondary students—particularly prayer and scripture reading—remain central to emotional wellbeing, spiritual identity, and meaning-making. While these practices often provided comfort and resilience, disengagement revealed tensions between tradition and personal meaning. Narratives of spiritual fatigue, unmet expectations, judgmental environments, and evolving beliefs reflected Frankl's emphasis on the human drive for purpose and Erikson's view of adolescent role confusion.

Self-Determination Theory further explained how autonomy and internalization shape faith practices, with Organismic Integration Theory showing how imposed routines may be internalized or resisted. Wetherell (2016) reinforced this perspective, noting that sacred texts provide nourishment, hope, and healing. Ultimately, the findings affirm that faith practices can be both sustaining and challenging, underscoring the need for inclusive spaces that nurture adolescent meaning, identity, and emotional wellbeing.

DISCUSSION

This study set out to examine the relationship between personal faith practices and SWB of secondary school students in Kasarani. Findings from both quantitative and qualitative data demonstrate a statistically significant positive correlation between personal faith practices and SWB. Furthermore, the qualitative findings reinforced these results, revealing how spiritual engagement provided emotional grounding and meaning. In addition, practices such as prayer and scripture reading played a meaningful role in fostering emotional resilience, enhancing life satisfaction, and supporting personal meaning-making among adolescents. Together, these results affirm the central role of personal faith practices in adolescent wellbeing and provide a foundation for exploring their broader cultural and psychosocial implications.

Faith Practices and Emotional Wellbeing

The statistically significant positive correlations between personal faith practices and both positive affect ($r = .211, p < .000$) and life satisfaction ($r = .239, p < .000$) indicate that students who engage consistently in spiritual activities tend to experience higher levels of emotional wellbeing. Qualitative narratives substantiated these results, with students describing prayer and scripture reading as sources of peace, strength, and clarity.

Scripture reading emerged as a particularly powerful practice, second only to personal prayer in frequency. Respondents described sacred texts—both the Bible and the Quran—as sources of divine assurance, emotional grounding, and existential clarity. Rather than being viewed as mere ritual, scripture reading was experienced as an intimate and transformative encounter with the divine. Furthermore, the emotional strength derived from trusting in divine promises and finding wisdom in sacred verses illustrates how faith practices contribute to SWB through meaning-making and spiritual intimacy.

These findings align with Pargament's (2002) work on religious coping, which highlights sacred texts as tools for emotional regulation and spiritual resilience. Similarly, King and Boyatzis (2004) emphasize that spiritual practices such as scripture reading play a critical role in adolescent identity development and psychological wellbeing. These combined findings present scripture reading as a dynamic practice that bolsters emotional strength, enriches spiritual identity, and supports adolescents in their search for meaning.

Disengagement and the Complexity of Adolescent Spirituality

While most respondents reported frequent engagement in prayer, a smaller group conveyed experiences of spiritual exhaustion, disillusionment, and shifting beliefs. Their reflections underscore the psychological toll of unmet expectations and exclusionary religious environments, revealing how rigid traditions risk alienating rather than supporting. This dynamic reflects broader transformations in adolescent spirituality, where personal meaning increasingly outweighs institutional conformity. In addition, these findings resonate with previous research by Ntsanwisi (2024) and Ndegwa (2002), who documented similar patterns of disengagement and redefinition among African youth.

Together, these studies highlight how prayer can symbolize ambiguity rather than comfort, especially in the absence of relatable mentors and safe spaces, underscoring the complexity of adolescent spirituality where, disengagement reflects not rejection but redefinition of faith in the pursuit of personal meaning.

Cultural Embeddedness of Faith Practices

The consistently high mean scores (e.g., overall $M = 3.27$, $SD = 0.81$) and low variability in faith practice engagement suggest that spirituality is not only personally meaningful but also culturally embedded within the Kasarani school context. Practices such as prayer ($M = 3.98$, $SD = 1.06$) and scripture reading ($M = 3.41$, $SD = 1.27$) functioned as shared norms shaping emotional wellbeing, moral orientation, and social belonging. This collective spiritual identity reinforces the idea that faith practices are integral to the psychosocial fabric of adolescent life. In this study, cultural embeddedness refers to how deeply a practice, belief, or behaviour is woven into the everyday life, values, and social norms of a particular community or group. This shared spiritual identity underscores how faith practices shape wellbeing, values, and belonging within the psychosocial fabric of adolescent life.

CONCLUSION

This study confirmed a positive relationship between personal faith practices and SWB among secondary school students in Kasarani. Prayer and scripture reading were linked to emotional resilience, life satisfaction, and meaning-making. Furthermore, while most students found comfort and clarity through spiritual engagement, a minority expressed spiritual fatigue and disillusionment, highlighting the need for more inclusive and emotionally supportive faith environments. Overall, these findings affirm spirituality as a central dimension of adolescent wellbeing, underscoring its vital role in fostering resilience, supporting meaning-making, and enhancing life satisfaction.

Conflict of Interest Statement

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this article.

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